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National Endowment for the Arts (1976): Speech 01

Claiborne Pell

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DRAFT OF SPEECH BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL:

It is indeed an honor and a pleasure for me to have this opportunity of addressing this Museum Trustees Seminar of the American Association of Museums.

As Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Education, and of the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities, and also of the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian Institution, I have long believed in the immense contributions museums make to our nation's well-being and its cultural advancement.

Perhaps, most important of all, they serve as educators of our people -- and I am pleased to note that years ago I helped in bringing this significant aspect of museum activities to the attention of the Congress and into legislative reality. As an example, in 1970 when Congress adopted the Environmental Education Act, museums were specifically included as educational institutions, and I was privileged

to lead the effort for that recognition of museum importance.

Museums are also the receptacles and the reservoirs of our nation's cultural heritage. They help us understand from whence we have come, and in that respect they give us guidance for the future. They enlighten us. They give us enjoyment. In their great variety, they teach us in many different ways to know and to understand. And they serve to inspire us and to lift our spirits. They add both knowledge and enrichment to our lives; and they are often centers for special programs which include performance as well as display: concerts, lectures, or, as the other night at the Smithsonian, a performance of Renaissance dances in period costumes.

Museums have become innovators in education. They have become centers for scholarship. But, most important, they are attracting new audiences. Any visitor to any of our fine museums cannot help

but leave enriched in experience and better informed.

When I first became a Senator, twelve years ago, I used to talk about 200 million visits being made to museums on an annual basis, and I used to compare this number favorably in terms, for example, of the numbers of people in our country attending baseball games. The Congress took note of this as a somewhat surprising indication of museum appeal and popularity. Since then, however, we have seen a quantum leap forward in museum attendance. In the past decade alone the annual rate of museum visits has more than tripled.

But, as you are all aware, the new popularity of our nation's museums should not be confused with prosperity. The economic factors which apply to our cultural endeavors preclude a prosperous financial situation. Indeed, as quality increases and attendance mounts,

the "income gap" between costs and sources of revenue and support widens. Even those museums which charge an admission fee -- and they are in the minority -- are reporting deficits in almost 50 per cent of their individual operations.

I need not remind you that many of our museums are forced to cut corners, and that many operate with inadequate or underpaid staffs, or that many are not in a position to compete effectively with other institutions for qualified professionals. The problems of adequate staff retirement programs, adequate health and life insurance programs, all remain as concerns in the museum field. According to the recent A. A. M. survey I have studied, these problems relate to more than 50 per cent of our museums.

It is clear to me that our museums remain in a time of financial difficulty and crisis. The traditional sources of finance -- private contributions, admission fees, and some state and local government

support -- have proved and are proving inadequate.

For all these reasons I believe there is a strong rationale for Federal assistance -- and I believe this rationale applies more today than in the past.

As you know, under the distinguished leadership of Miss Nancy Hanke and Dr. Renald Berman and their respective councils, the arts and humanities program is coming to the aid of museums.

The National Endowment for the Arts is assisting museums with more than \$4 million. Programs include aid to special exhibitions, conservation, fellowships for museum professionals, a program to enable museums to purchase works of art and thus expand their collections, museum training to upgrade the quality of museum staff work, renovation which relates specifically to climate control within museums structures, and surveys which identify museum needs,

problems, and future goals. In addition, there are a number of pilot projects which relate to improved community service.

Similarly, plans have been made to further expand the museum program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This Endowment through its Education Division makes grants involving individual museums and formal institutions of learning -- elementary, secondary, college or university. In this way the museum is made a part of the formal educational process, in partnership with a school. Its Division of Public Programs has assumed the responsibility of supporting museums interested in the mounting of educational programs in the humanities for the adult public. The Endowment is concerned also with strengthening the museum's role as a community educator, involving such projects as seminars and the development of community galleries. In addition, grant support is available for graduate fellowships and internships and training programs for current and potential

museum staff. At this time the Endowment is planning to spend \$4 million, with approximately \$2 million for the support of exhibitions, \$1 million for community education grants and \$1 million for museum staff training and special workshops.

It is interesting to note -- and most important to note, I believe, that the museum funding levels I have mentioned for the two Endowments combined total almost twice their total appropriation for all programs the first fiscal year of their existence, and very close to the total appropriation for both Endowments for all programs during their second fiscal year.

We can thus readily see how museums have benefitted by this legislation -- and how they will benefit increasingly, if the levels in my new authorizing bill are approved. I would not want to second guess either Miss Hanks or Dr. Berman or their two councils in this

regard, except to say that I am very pleased indeed that museum activities have become a highly significant part of their endeavors.

And I want to take this opportunity of urging all of you who are so interested in museums to help, in every way possible, to defend this new legislation against curtailment. As I'm sure you know, efforts are being made to seriously limit the authorized amounts. I expect this bill to come before the full Senate for action very soon after the Easter recess, which concludes on April 29. The amendment proposed by Senator Proxmire from Wisconsin would cut in half the funding levels I have proposed for the authorization for the third year. It would reduce that amount by \$200 million and it would proportionately reduce the funding levels proposed for the next two fiscal years by \$40 million and \$120 million respectively.

I can only say that we will need most valiant and comprehensive efforts, if we are to prevail. As I said recently, if a vote were

to be taken tomorrow, I believe we would lose, so it is really a matter of how much support is expressed to the Senate as a whole by all concerned individuals and constituencies, of which the museum field is of such importance to us all. In this regard, I consider the defense against limitation of the authorization a first priority. And I cannot stress this to you too strongly.

Now as you know, I am also deeply concerned with support for museums which would not be possible for the arts and humanities endowments. For this reason I have re-introduced in the ³92nd Congress the "Museum Services Act." I had previously introduced this legislation in November of 1971. I believe it has served to focus attention on the plight of museums and on their needs, even though the Congress took no action in its previous session.

A major thrust of this bill is toward assisting museums "to meet their administrative costs in preserving and maintaining their

collections, exhibiting them to the public, and providing educational programs to the public through the use of their collections."

I want to stress the words "administrative costs," for I believe they go to the heart of museum needs at the present time.

The bill would establish an Institute for the Improvement of Museum Services within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, to be headed by a director appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. It would also create a National Museum Services Board of 15 Presidentially appointed members broadly representative of the curatorial, educational and cultural resources of the United States and of the general public. And as ex officio members it would include the Librarian of Congress, the Archivist of the United States, the Commissioner of Education, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, the Director of the National Gallery of Art, and the Chairmen of both the Arts Endowment and the Humanities Endowment.

The Board would have the responsibility for carrying out the policies of the Act. Authorizations would begin at \$25 million and would increase to \$30 million in succeeding fiscal years.

At this point in time, I could not forecast the possibilities of this bill's success. But I believe I have initiated legislative momentum in a constructive and helpful direction and I look forward to pursuing this important prospect when we have a clearer feeling on the arts and humanities legislation.

Indeed it could be said that these two legislative concepts go hand in hand, with the arts and humanities now having a leading share in the partnership and, as I have said, in my judgment a first priority.

I would conclude by saying that I am firmly committed to helping our nation's museums in every way possible, and I look forward to working with you consistently as we seek together to improve museum

services and the vital part they play in our cultural advancement

and in our nation's life.